

#### **STAR Program Questions and Answers**

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#### 1. General STAR Questions

### 1.1 Are STAR Program scores currently available for stations and technicians?

No. BAR does not have the authority to publish STAR Program scores until the STAR regulations have been adopted. STAR regulation adoption is expected later this year.

#### 1.2 What are the key program dates for the STAR Program?

BAR does not have the authority to publish actual STAR scores until the adoption of the STAR regulations. Once the regulations are adopted, BAR will publish STAR scores for all stations and technicians. BAR expects the regulations to be adopted as early as summer 2011.

The Gold Shield Program will end on December 31, 2012, and the new STAR Program will officially begin on January 1, 2013. To help with the transition, stations can begin applying for the STAR Program beginning on July 1, 2012.

### 1.3 How long does a station have to be in business before it can become STAR certified?

Stations may apply once they have one quarter of data to review during the application process.

#### 1.4 How often are STAR scores updated?

The STAR performance measures reported on the BAR Web page can be divided into two groups. The first is the short-term measures, which include the Test Deviations, Similar Vehicle Failure Rate (SVFR), and Improper Gear Selection during the ASM test. The second group includes criteria associated with the Follow-up Pass Rate (FPR), which is a long-term performance measure. The short-term scores are updated every month, however, pass/fail decisions are made only on a calendar quarter basis. FPR scores, on the other hand, are calculated and updated on the Web page twice a year, in January and July.

#### 1.5 Can shop owners use the STAR Web site to hire technicians?

STAR scores are provided for all stations and technicians licensed to perform Smog Check inspections and/or repairs in the Smog Check Program. Stations looking to hire new technicians may choose to check the applicant's STAR scores prior to hiring since the technician's FPR score will directly affect the station's STAR certification. Similarly, station owners can check a technician's performance on the other STAR measures to make sure that the technician is less prone to adversely affect a station's STAR scores.

Technicians also may want to check the STAR scores of stations that are potential employers.

## 1.6 Once a station's STAR certification is invalidated, how long until that station is eligible to re-apply to the STAR Program?

Stations that have their STAR certification invalidated by BAR are not eligible to apply for the STAR Program for at least six months. A station or any of its technicians also cannot have received a citation within the last year, nor have been the subject of a BAR administrative action with the last three years. Both are based on the effective date of the citation or administrative action, and not the date of issuance.

## 1.7 If a STAR-certified station relocates to a new address, will they have to re-apply to the STAR Program?

No. As is currently the case with the current Gold Shield Program, a change of address will not affect a station's certification under the STAR Program.

#### 1.8 How will motorists know which stations are STAR certified?

The most convenient and up-to-date way for motorists to identify stations that can inspect their vehicles is on the BAR Web page. The page contains a station search tool to help motorists find stations in their area, including the ability to search by type of station (Test Only, Test-and-Repair, and Gold Shield). When the STAR Program is implemented in January 2013, this Web page will be updated to allow motorists to identify STAR Test-and-Repair and STAR Test-Only stations, as well as other stations that are not STAR certified. The following link opens the current station search tool:

#### http://www.smogcheck.ca.gov/pubwebquery/station/stationlist.aspx

Motorists will also be able to identify STAR certified stations through new signs that will be required at these stations. To vote on the logo designs being considered for the STAR Program, please visit our online survey at:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YTDSRYT

## 1.9 Can motorists use the STAR Web site to find stations and technicians that are more likely to perform a low quality inspection?

BAR is aware that some motorists may try to use the Web site to identify lower-performing Smog Check stations that are more likely to perform an improper Smog Check inspection. To reduce the likelihood of this happening, the Web page has been designed to require that the user know the station or technician license number in order to conduct a search. While this will not prevent unintended use of the Web page, it will make it less convenient, and hopefully, less common.

## 1.10 How are the standards for the STAR performance measures generated?

Standards for the STAR performance measures are set by evaluating stations and technicians against other stations and technicians throughout the Smog Check program. For an explanation of how each STAR performance measure is evaluated, click on the title of any of the performance measures shown on the report card feature of the STAR Web page. The following link opens an example scenario for the STAR Report Card:

http://www.smogcheck.ca.gov/PubWebQuery/STAR/station/555558/ST.aspx

### 1.11 What source of data is used to generate the STAR performance scores?

All STAR performance scores are calculated using data collected by the BAR-97 Emissions Inspection System during a vehicle inspection and then transmitted to the Vehicle Inspection Database (VID).

#### 1.12 Will the STAR Web page be available in Spanish?

Yes. BAR is planning to release the STAR Web page in Spanish. BAR will notify stations in an ET Blast once the Spanish version of the Web page becomes available.

## 1.13 My Smog Check station offers a free retest to consumers who fail their initial Smog Check at my station. Will this policy affect my STAR certification, and if so, how?

It could. Stations offering "free retests" must provide two inspections for the price of one whenever a vehicle fails its initial inspection. This can cut into station profits, especially at busy stations where shop owners must forgo additional work to perform the retests. A station's eligibility for the STAR Program could be jeopardized in situations where stations and technicians perform incomplete or inaccurate Smog Check inspections to avoid having to provide "free retests."

# 1.14 I own a Smog Check station in a Change of Ownership Area. Can I still become a STAR-certified station even though the majority of vehicles my station inspects are not in a biennial inspection (Enhanced or Basic) area?

Yes. Stations located in a Change of Ownership Area still will have the opportunity to participate in the STAR Program. However, one of the rewards of the Program – the ability to certify directed and gross-polluting vehicles – may not have as much value to a station located outside of an Enhanced Area, or even a Basic Area. Scores for both stations and technicians from Change of Ownership Areas will be posted on the STAR Web page along with scores for stations and technicians from the Enhanced and Basic Areas of the state.

#### 2. Questions Related to Test-Only, Test-and-Repair

## 2.1 What types of stations will be operating in the Smog Check Program when the STAR Program begins?

When the STAR Program begins on January 1, 2013, Smog Check stations planning to test vehicles can be licensed as either a Test-Only station or a Test-and-Repair station. Gold Shield stations will cease to exist. Both Test-Only and Test-and-Repair stations may apply for STAR certification. As a result, there will be four possible station types:

- **Test-Only** -- can only test vehicles, but <u>cannot</u> test directed vehicles or gross-polluting vehicles;
- Test-and-Repair can test and repair vehicles, but <u>cannot</u> test directed vehicles or gross-polluting vehicles;
- **STAR Test-Only** can only test vehicles, including directed vehicles and gross-polluting vehicles;
- STAR Test-and-Repair can test and repair vehicles, including directed vehicles and gross-polluting vehicles; also must provide repair assistance services under BAR's Consumer Assistance Program.

In addition, BAR is preparing a regulation package to create a new Repair-Only station license for the Smog Check Program. However, since these stations will be licensed only to perform repairs, and no Smog Check inspections, they will not be eligible for the STAR Program.

## 2.2 If I own a Test-Only station but choose not to participate in the STAR Program, can I still inspect directed vehicles?

No. Only STAR certified stations may inspect directed and gross-polluting vehicles.

## 2.3 Can Test-Only stations apply for certification under the STAR Program?

Yes. Unlike the current Gold Shield Program, there are no repair-based performance measures in the STAR Program that would prevent Test-Only stations from applying.

#### 2.4 Can a Test-Only station apply for certification as a STAR Test-and-Repair station?

Yes. Since there are no repair-based performance measures in the STAR Program, a Test-Only station will be allowed to change its license to a Test-and-Repair station and apply for the STAR Program.

## 2.5 Can I own both a Test-Only station and a Test-and-Repair station, regardless of whether or not the stations are STAR-certified?

Yes, but with some restrictions. If the two stations have a common financial interest and are located adjacent to each other, or in the same business park, strip mall, or industrial complex, one station cannot be licensed as a Test-Only station and the other licensed as a Test and Repair station. Instead, they both must be either licensed as a Test-and-Repair station or both licensed as a Test-Only station.

#### 3. Questions Related to Gold Shield

#### 3.1 What happens to Gold Shield stations in January 2013?

The Gold Shield Program will be ending on December 31, 2012. Gold Shield stations must apply for STAR certification and be certified by BAR Licensing if the station wants the uninterrupted ability to inspect directed and gross-polluting vehicles when the new STAR Program begins in January 2013. To help prepare for the transition, stations may apply to the STAR Program beginning in July 2012.

#### 3.2 How does the Gold Shield Program differ from the STAR Program?

The Gold Shield Program is specifically designed to grant Test-and-Repair stations that met specific performance criteria the ability to inspect directed vehicles. Gold Shield stations were also responsible for performing state-funded repairs under the Consumer Assistance Program (CAP). The performance measures for the Gold Shield Program are largely based on repair data.

The STAR Program is a certification program for both Test-Only stations and Test-and-Repair stations that wish to inspect directed vehicles and gross-polluting vehicles. Stations that are not STAR certified are not allowed to certify directed and gross polluting vehicles. By law, performance measures for the STAR Program must be the same for both Test-Only stations and Test-and-Repair stations; therefore, there are no standards that are based on the number or quality of repairs. The performance measures for the STAR Program also must be inspection-based. CAP repairs currently performed by Gold Shield stations will be performed by STAR certified Test-and-Repair stations beginning in January 2013.

#### 4. Questions Related to Non-FPR Performance Measures

## 4.1 Where can I get more information on the performance measures of the STAR Program?

The STAR Web page has detailed information on each of the performance measures that can be accessed by clicking various hyperlinks within the STAR report. Each performance measure links to a definition of that performance measure.

## 4.2 Can one isolated mistake on a Smog Check inspection force me out of the STAR Program?

It depends on the nature of the mistake. A mistake that leads to a citation or an administrative action is grounds for and can lead to the invalidation of a station's STAR certification. In contrast, it generally takes several repeated inspection errors before a station fails to meet any of the STAR performance measures that are based on Smog Check inspection data.

## 4.3 How does the STAR Program account for different socio-economic areas in which stations operate?

Stations located in areas where their clientele tends to own older, higher mileage vehicles will not be penalized. This is because the results for each vehicle inspected by each station or technician will be compared to results from similar vehicles inspected throughout the state.

## 4.4 I can't control when motorists reset their computers prior to a Smog Check. Won't this affect my Test Deviations result for maximum readiness monitors?

While it is true that technicians often cannot control when motorists reset computers prior to an initial inspection, they should not recommend or provide this procedure to motorists prior to an inspection. When considering large samples of data, there is no reason to expect that motorists will reset vehicles tested at one station at a rate greater than similar vehicles inspected at other stations. For this reason, the primary difference between stations will be behavioral in nature. Stations that reset computers prior to inspection, or those that recommend the procedure for motorists, will tend to have elevated monitor reset levels.

# 4.5 When I repair a failing vehicle, I make sure all of the OBD II monitors have run prior to certifying it. Other stations, however, may follow different procedures. Will I be penalized on the Max Readiness Monitor test deviation for certifying repaired vehicles with unset readiness monitors?

No. The Max Readiness Monitor check only considers the number of unset monitors, if any, for each vehicle during its initial inspection. An initial inspection is defined as the first test done in an inspection cycle on a vehicle, whether it be a pre-test or an official Smog Check inspection. Retests that occur after a vehicle fails an initial inspection are not considered under this performance measure.

Where a station's STAR score could potentially be affected by certifying vehicles with unset readiness monitors, however, is through the Follow-up Pass Rate (FPR). Vehicles with underlying defects that are certified even though the offending OBD II monitor hasn't yet run will tend to fail their initial inspection at a higher rate in the next inspection cycle. This will tend to drive down the FPR scores for stations that previously certified these vehicles.

## 4.6 For the gear shift measure, won't a station be penalized if many of the vehicles it inspects have big wheels (e.g., modified 4WD trucks)?

No. The incorrect gear shift measure is fairly lenient and allows for some variation in tire size without identifying an inspection as being driven in the incorrect gear. The real underlying question here is whether or not technicians are allowed to modify test procedures when motorists have modified their vehicles to such an extent that the vehicle cannot pass the emissions test when driven in the correct gear.

Smog Check technicians are required to follow the procedures outlined in the <u>Smog Check Inspection Procedures Manual</u>.

Automatic transmission vehicles should be tested in "drive" while manual transmission vehicles should be tested in 2<sup>nd</sup> gear. Manual transmission vehicles can only be shifted into a different gear if the engine RPM during an ASM mode falls outside of the allowable range. If a vehicle fails the ASM test because the vehicle has incorrectly-sized tires which affected the emission readings, the technician should <u>not</u> accommodate the non-stock tires by modifying the test procedure. Instead, the vehicle should be returned to its stock configuration and then tested.

## 4.7 How do you measure repair effectiveness for STAR Test-and-Repair stations?

Repair effectiveness is not evaluated as part of the STAR Program. <u>AB 2289 (Eng, Chapter 258, Statutes of 2010)</u> specifically precludes BAR from using different performance measures for both Test Only stations and Test-and-Repair stations in the STAR Program. Since Test-Only stations do not perform repairs, we cannot use repair effectiveness as a performance measure for any station in the STAR Program.

## 4.8 If a technician at the station I own gets a citation, is my station out of the program?

A STAR station cannot employ a technician who has received a citation within the last year or is the subject of a BAR administrative action within the last three years. Both are based on the effective date of the citation or administrative action, and not the date of issuance. This is true even if the technician received a citation or had an administrative action taken against their license while employed at another station.

#### 5. Questions Related to the Follow-up Pass Rate (FPR)

## 5.1 Can I participate in the STAR Program if I employ a technician who has a low FPR score?

If a station employs a technician with an FPR score that does not meet STAR standards, the station may have difficulty having its application approved for the STAR Program. Additionally, a STAR certified station may be in jeopardy of having its STAR certification invalidated by the BAR for employing a technician with an unacceptable FPR score. The table shown at the following link will help to explain this process. FPR Table

## 5.2 If a STAR certified station employs a technician whose FPR score drops too low (0.1 or less), will the station automatically be ineligible to inspect directed vehicles?

Stations are subject to having their STAR certification invalidated any time they employ a technician with a low FPR score. The invalidation process will include notification to the station and an opportunity to appeal the proposed decision. BAR may consider the quick removal of a problem technician from a station as a mitigating circumstance.

## 5.3 Under the FPR, is a station's eligibility for the STAR Program based upon an average of the FPR scores of all technicians working at the station?

No, it is based on the lowest score of any technician currently found in the station's EIS Technician Information Table. Once a station is STAR certified, the Bureau considers any technician entered into any of the station's EIS Technician Information Tables, even if that tech has only performed smog checks for one day during the period under review, providing the employment did not occur prior to acceptance into the STAR program. Consider the following example: a station employs ten Smog Check technicians, nine of whom have perfect FPR scores of 1, and the tenth technician has an FPR score of 0. If you averaged the technicians' FPR scores together, it would be 0.9. However, since the evaluation is not based on the average, the station still would be denied STAR certification, or if already STAR certified, possibly be in jeopardy of having its certification invalidated, because the one technician has too low of an FPR score. For purposed of the STAR Program, the station would be eligible with respect to the FPR once the low-scoring technician is removed from all of the station's EIS Technician Information Tables and is no longer performing Smog Check inspections or repairs at the station.

### 5.4 What are my options if I am both a station owner/operator and a technician with a low FPR score?

A Smog Check station owner who is also a technician at the station and has a low FPR score may do one of two things. Since the STAR Program is strictly voluntary, the owner may choose not to have his or her station participate in the STAR Program. If the owner wishes to participate in the STAR Program, he or she must hire another technician to perform all Smog Check-related duties. He or she may not be listed in the Smog Check Technician Information Table in any of the station's EIS units without affecting the station's participation in the STAR Program. The technician/owner must improve his or her FPR score to acceptable levels before he or she can perform inspections at a station that wants to participate in the STAR Program.

#### 5.5 How do stations or technicians improve their FPR score?

Smog Check technicians are the gate keepers to ensure that vehicles that should fail their Smog Check inspection actually do fail. Once the vehicles have failed, motorists will seek the necessary repairs to bring their vehicles into compliance. Too often, however, vehicles that should fail inspection are being inappropriately passed. This type of behavior will hurt a station's and technician's FPR score over time.

The best way for technicians to improve their FPR score is to perform accurate inspections according to the Smog Check Inspection Procedures Manual on every vehicle inspected by the technicians. Station owners can improve their FPR scores by ensuring that their technicians perform accurate inspections on vehicles coming through the station.

Specific behaviors that affect a station's or technician's FPR score include:

- Clean piping (i.e., passing a vehicle that is out of compliance with the tailpipe emissions standards by introducing a substitute clean exhaust sample through the emissions analyzer)
- Clean plugging (i.e., using a substitute source of OBD II data for a failing vehicle's OBD II self-diagnostic test)
- Shifting vehicles into the wrong gear during an ASM test
- Over-conditioning vehicles (i.e., racing the engine to get a vehicle's catalytic converter hotter than would happen under normal operating conditions)
- Not identifying visual inspection failures
- Not identifying functional inspection failures (e.g., fuel cap, ignition timing, low-pressure fuel evaporative emissions)
- Entering incorrect vehicle parameters to generate more lenient emission standards or a lighter vehicle weight loading (in order to create less treadmill resistance) during an ASM test

#### 5.6 How long does it take to improve an FPR score?

The Follow-up Pass Rate considers how vehicles certified by each station or technician perform in their next Smog Check inspection cycle. For this reason, it could take up to 2 years to totally flush out all of the data generated by a station or technician. Still, stations and technicians can start to change their scores much sooner with the help of change-of-ownership inspections that can occur well short of the two years of a biennial inspection.

#### 5.7 How does the FPR differ from the SVFR?

The SVFR compares the initial test failure rate for vehicles inspected at each station to the initial test failure rate for "similar vehicles" statewide. The FPR is similar in concept, however, it measures whether the actual vehicles certified by each station or technician in the last cycle are passing in the current cycle at a higher or lower rate than expected in comparison to other similar vehicles inspected throughout the state.

## 5.8 I can't control what happens to a vehicle after it leaves my shop. Won't this affect my FPR score?

Stations and technicians have little control over what motorists do to their vehicles once the vehicle leaves the shop. For this reason, it would be misleading to extrapolate a particular station's performance based upon how one, or even a few, vehicles performed during the next Smog Check inspection. For example, some properly inspected vehicles with passing emissions levels will fall into disrepair before their next Smog Check inspection. Conversely, other improperly certified high emitting vehicles may get fixed to run properly in their next inspection cycle. For this reason, the FPR performance measure is calculated using large amounts of data. This way, anomalous events like those just mentioned will tend to average out for all the stations and technicians. Instead of the anomalies, the systematic trends associated with proper versus improper inspections will emerge and drive the FPR scores.

# 5.9 If a customer of mine refuses additional necessary repairs once the vehicle's emissions will marginally pass the Smog Check, will this affect my FPR score and STAR certification even though I recommended additional repairs?

Unlike the Gold Shield Program, the STAR Program does not consider after repair emissions levels in the evaluation any performance measures. In fact, repair data doesn't factor into the STAR Program evaluation at all. Still, the Follow-up Pass Rate (FPR) measure under the STAR Program does consider whether or not vehicles certified by each station and technician pass at a higher or lower rate than average in the next inspection cycle when compared to similar vehicles. Stations that make a habit of certifying vehicles with incomplete repairs (e.g., masking a fuel system problem with a new catalytic converter) may notice a lower FPR score in the long-term, but it is unlikely that this behavior alone would push the station's or technician's FPR score to an unacceptable level. Stations and technicians who want to improve their FPR score and become STAR-certified should primarily focus on performing accurate Smog Check inspections according to the Smog Check Inspection Procedures Manual. If this is done, the marginal vehicles needing additional repairs will be less of a factor in the overall FPR calculations.

# 5.10 If the FPR evaluates how vehicles previously certified by stations and technicians are performing in the current inspection cycle, how will new stations and technicians be evaluated under this performance measure?

Smog Check stations and technicians with extremely low inspection volumes, including newly licensed stations and technicians, will not receive an FPR score. An FPR score will only be generated once there is a sufficient volume of follow-up inspections performed on vehicles previously certified by that station or technician.

In most cases, the lack of an FPR score will not be an issue in determining a station's eligibility for the STAR Program. The only time that a lack of an FPR score may be an issue is when a technician seeks to be employed by a STAR-certified station that itself has a low FPR score (less than 0.4). STAR stations with low FPR scores cannot hire technicians who do not have FPR scores.

Similarly, STAR-certified stations without FPR scores cannot hire technicians with low FPR scores (less than 0.4). This is the same limitation placed on STAR stations with FPR scores greater than or equal to 0.4. For more information on the various FPR rules for determining STAR Program eligibility, please visit the following link: FPR Table.

#### 6. I Still Can't Find the Answer to My Question!

## 6.1 What if I have a question that does not appear on this list of Questions and Answers?

Please send us an email at <u>STAR@dca.ca.gov</u> so that we can add it to the Q&A list and help other stations and technicians who may have the same or similar question.